eLINK Guidance Document

Lumping and Splitting Activities

December 2014

Purpose: This document provides guidance on when to lump or split projects, tasks, or units of work into individual **activities** in eLINK. The most granular or elemental split is into individual best management practices; however, this is not always the most efficient means to manage conservation projects. Grouping, lumping, or splitting includes many shades of gray, depending upon the specifics of the situation. However, a good general rule of thumb is: when in doubt, split. If you have any questions about whether to lump or split an activity, contact your Board Conservationist

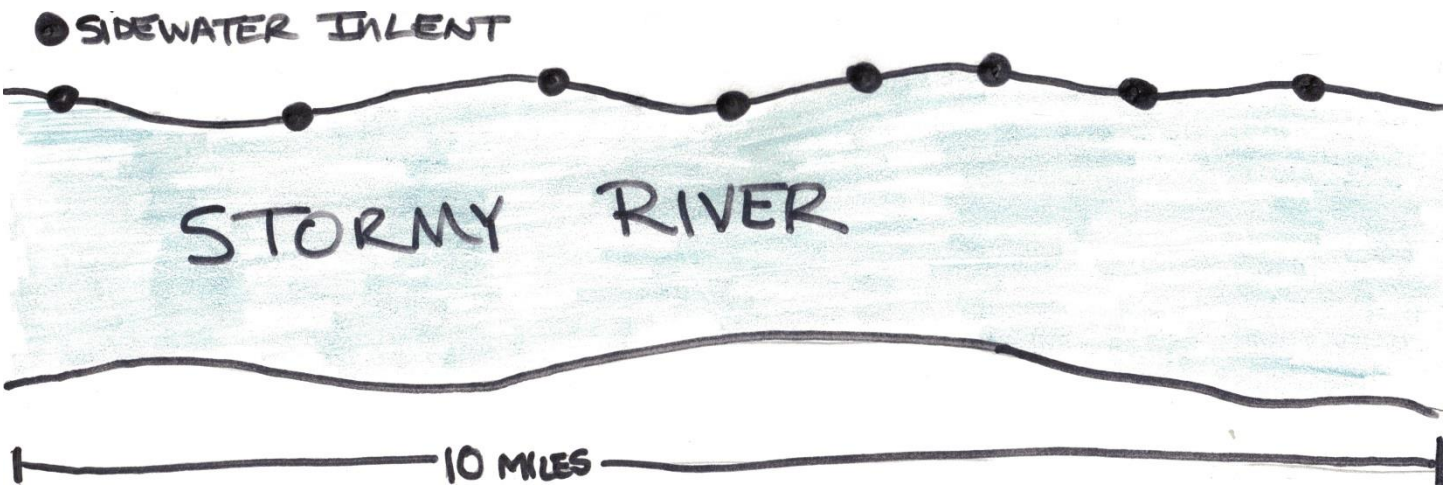
When should an Activity be split?

The first consideration in splitting activities in eLINK is at the level of **Activity Category**. See the *eLINK Guidance Document: Activity Categories* for definitions and refer to the requirements of the individual grant program for the eligibility of given categories within a specific grant. Specific grants may have specific requirements for how activities are to be reported.

Some additional items to evaluate when considering whether or not split an activity are:

1. Different/disconnected practices on the same parcel are addressing significantly different issues that fall into separate activity categories. For example: a stream bank restoration project addressing soil erosion is installed on one part of the property while at the same time a project to manage feedlot runoff and milkhouse waste is installed to address excess nutrients on another part of the property. Both of these projects are funded through the same grant. The user should split these projects into one **Streambank or Shoreline Protection** activity and one **Livestock Waste Management** activity each with potentially multiple activity details or best management practices. However, if the two practices are dependent upon each other (treatment train) and fall into the same activity category, then lump into one activity.
2. The same practices are addressing different water resources, especially if the water resources are in different watersheds. For example: installation of lakeshore restoration practices on three lakes within the county, all located in separate major watersheds with separate partners – split into three Streambank or Shoreline Protection activities, one for each lake, and each with potentially multiple activity details or best management practices.
3. An activity should be split when individual landowner or activity match needs to be tracked, as with the State Conservation Cost-Share Program.

4. The practices address the same water resource. Consider the example below where there are multiple side water inlets along a 10 mile stretch of river.

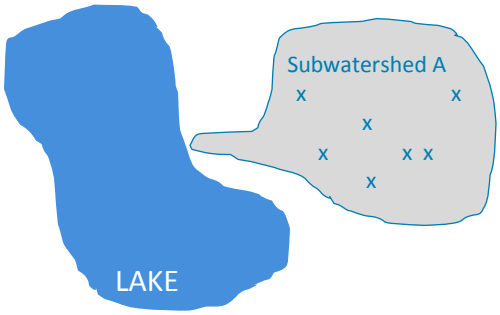


When should an Activity be lumped?

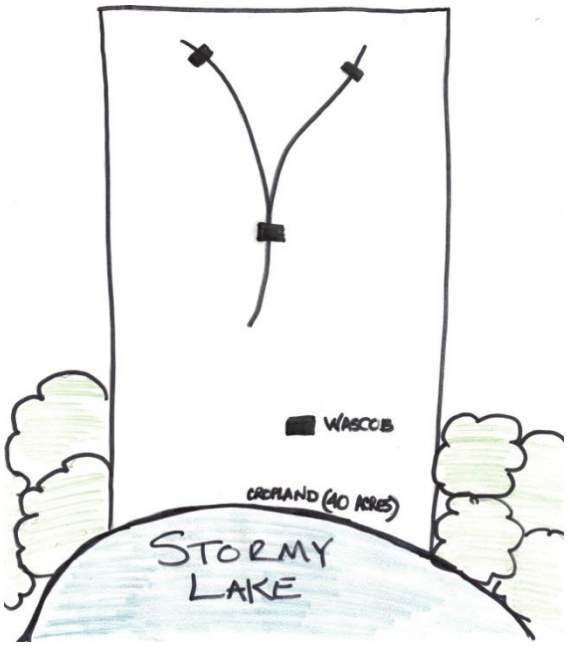
As with splitting, the first consideration in lumping activities in eLINK is at the level of **Activity Category**. Consider lumping activities in eLINK when:

1. There is a feedlot fix.
2. Different practices are installed as an overall project for one water resources and are in a treatment train. For example:

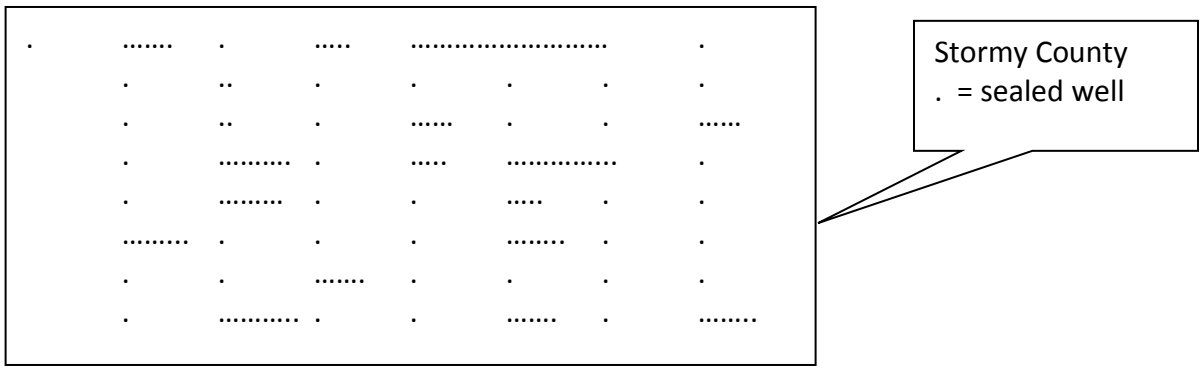
3. The same practices are installed on different properties but address the same water resource in a discrete area. For example if x = raingardens installed in a priority subwatershed to the lake:



4. The same practices are installed on the same contiguous property. For example:



5. The same practices are too numerous to map individually and do not necessarily have an associated pollution reduction estimates.



Why does it matter?

One of the objectives of a reporting system such as eLINK is to easily summarize the outputs from grant expenditures and make some connection to the desired environmental outcomes from those expenditures. As expectations have risen about the ability of the reporting system to quickly summarize the information and address the question of outcomes, it has become apparent that the information entered into eLINK can either facilitate or hinder this discussion.

Consider this example: Two separate LGUs construct and install a series of stormwater basins or water-and-sediment-control basins (WASCOBS) with landowners in their jurisdiction along a river that crosses the city limits or county line. One LGU reports 5 individual basins costing $10,000 each as individual activities. The other LGU enters one activity with 5 basins identified in the narrative section for a total cost of $50,000.

When asked "What's the outcome of grant funds in addressing pollution problems in the river," the report generated in eLINK will say that there were 6 activities identified as stormwater management basins or WASCOBS along this river for a total cost of $100,000. That is not an accurate picture in either the number of basins or the cost per structure. In

order to get a complete picture, someone has to manually check each of the entries associated with that resource. Multiply that example by additional LGUs along a common water resource or trying to get an accurate count of the number of basins statewide and the problem becomes readily apparent.

This document is an attempt to guide the reporting of conservation activities so that there is more consistency in reporting for outcomes and less manual work required within the eLINK database to answer commonly asked questions. Many factors can influence the choice for how to report practices in each situation. The general rule of thumb is: when in doubt split.